

BILLERICAY & WICKFORD Gazette



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WE'RE ARMED AND STAYING

Gypsies' warning as £13m eviction plans put in place

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"WE are armed and ready to fight" is the message from travellers faced with eviction from Europe's biggest gypsy site.

The warning was issued as Basildon Borough Council paves the way for the £13 million eviction of almost 100 families from the Dale Farm site in Crays Hill next spring.

Traveller Jerry Delaney, 26, was adamant any eviction would be met with resistance.

"We are going to try and fight it," he said.

"We are going to get gas bottles and block the road and make an explosion if we have to. Everyone has thought about it."

He added: "We would prefer them not to come here at all. But if they do come someone will get badly hurt. They will need an



CRITICISM:
Traveller
spokesman
Grattan
Puxon

thinks the
cash could
be spent on
helping
families

bulances and armed police because we are going to be armed.

"We have got single and double-barrelled guns and we are willing to shoot."

Given the unprecedented size of the operation, the council has applied to the Department for Communities and Local Government for an expenditure grant of £3 million.

In addition, Essex Police has applied to the Home Office for a grant of £10 million.

Both grant applications are based on indicative amounts in

order to cover costs incurred that cannot be met from existing budgets.

Traveller spokesman Grattan Puxon condemned the council's plan.

"To spend £3 million per acre seems to be disproportionate because the whole issue of finding an alternative for the families could be done within a budget of £2-3 million," he said.

He added that he will be assisting traveller families in seeking injunctions to prevent eviction.

Survey

Mr Puxon also invited students from the University of Essex to carry out a survey of the properties on the site, a traveller may claim for damage to property following a site clearance.

News of the planned eviction has also brought to the fore the

split in Basildon Council between the Labour and Conservative groups.

Councillor Lynda Gration, leader of the Labour group, said: "We have always opposed an eviction on both financial and humanitarian grounds. We believe that to pay that sort of money for an enforcement issue is wrong."

Council leader Tony Bell, a Conservative, said the council had been working to secure an alternative site for the travellers, but had withdrawn from negotiations with the county council, the homes and communities agency and government office for the East of England, after plans were leaked to the media.

He said: "We still hope for a peaceful resolution, but will take direct action if necessary to ensure planning regulations are uniformly applied across all sectors of the community."

USELESS: A lifebelt has been frozen in the water

"At the moment there are not enough lifebelts to go right round the lake."

Mr Griffiths added replacement lifebelts have been put in place but beyond these there are no more spaces as no number of belts are still in the lake.

Laura Anderson, spokeswoman for Essex Police, said: "If you see anyone doing such things, please you to call us so we can deal with those responsible."

Councillor Terence Gandy said he is working to secure new perimeter fencing around the park to protect against vandalism.

He said: "At the moment we are fitting two gates and leaving gaps in three other places. We need to secure these entrances."

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